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CRITICAL NOTICES.

JEVONS' "HISTORY OF RELIGION."

An Introduction to the History of Religion, by F. B. JEVONS. (Methuen).

THIS is in many ways an important as well as an interesting book. Its importance consists in the fact that it focuses on the problem of the origin of religion several lines of investigation which have dealt with isolated problems in the way of folk-lore and anthropology. In other words, it summarizes and connects Mr. Fraser's *Golden Bough* and Robertson Smith's *Religion of the Semites*. But it would be doing injustice to Dr. Jevons if we were to represent his book as only doing this. Not to mention several independent suggestions, as, for example, the suggestion that the domestication of animals and plants was an indirect result of their worship as Totems, Dr. Jevons has been the first to apply the new searchlight all round, and discuss all the main points from this new standpoint. And, above all, he has approached the subject in an altogether sympathetic spirit, which can scarcely be said of some of the inquirers into the primitive origins of the feelings most sacred to many of us.

Dr. Jevons' theme is the origin and history of natural religion as opposed to the consideration of the positive religions—Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. I do not quite know where Dr. Jevons would place Judaism, since his definition of a positive religion is "the outcome of the teaching of an individual venture," and designed to supersede the existing religions, which, being practised as a matter of custom and tradition, may be called "customary religions." Now the Judaism that has made religion, as the modern world conceives it, was practically the work of the Hebrew prophets. Yet, on the other hand, it was not intended entirely to supersede the customary creed and practice of the Israelites. Truly these were a peculiar people, even, or perhaps, one may say, particularly with regard to their religion.

Dr. Jevons fully recognizes and emphasizes this point; indeed, it is one of the novel points of his book, the emphasis he lays upon the "revelational" character of Hebrew religion. Two of the most

interesting novel chapters of his book deal with the Greek mysteries, which Dr. Jevons attributes to Semitic, by which it would appear he means Hebrew, influence. One would have been glad to have had some evidence on which this somewhat startling statement is based. Robertson Smith, to whom he refers, is equally emphatic, but he is equally reticent about the facts on which his emphasis is based. Here, as elsewhere, one finds Dr. Jevons accepting Robertson Smith practically without criticism.

Thus he takes from Robertson Smith the two keys with which that thinker thought he could unlock the mysteries of all the mythologies. Taboo and Totem are invoked to explain all the problems of ancient ritual and belief, or rather they are the two opposing forces by which religion progresses and produces morality. Social morals are a supernatural selection from Taboo. Here, as elsewhere, Dr. Jevons practically confesses the inability of the science of religion to explain origins. Such a confession is, perhaps, a necessary stage in a young science where the first process must be to determine the unknown quantities, but it is too early to despair so dogmatically as to the possibility of solving the problem of Taboo.

While with Taboo Dr. Jevons is too dogmatic, in his agnosticism with regard to Totemism one cannot help thinking he follows Robertson Smith in an opposite kind of dogmatism. In my *Studies in Biblical Archaeology* I have pointed out on what a slender basis of fact Robertson Smith rests his view that sacrifice is a common meal of a clan and its Totem. Practically the only evidence on which this view is based is afforded by a passage in Nilus, a writer of the fourth century A. D. It would be indeed strange if no other trace could be found for this source of all religious feeling. Indeed, both Robertson Smith and Dr. Jevons have to own that in historic times there is no proof that sacrifice was resorted to with the conscious idea of restoring communion with the Totem or the god. If so, the *second* origin of the idea of communion is the important moment in the history of religion, and is one requiring explanation. From this point of view the mystery of the mysteries is the true unknown quantity, and one of the most important and novel contributions of Dr. Jevons' book consists in having brought this out so clearly.

The attractive part of Robertson Smith's theory of sacrifice is that he traces religion back to love and communion rather than, as with other anthropologists, to fear and aversion. And Dr. Jevons emphasizes this point at every stage of his analysis, but lays stress upon the fact that in so-called savage tribes there is a remarkable display of altruistic feeling within the tribe. He might have supported his contention by reference to Prince Krapotkin's remarkable papers in *The Nineteenth Century*, in which he shows that, both in animal and

in early human societies, mutual assistance must be postulated as a balancing force in the struggle for existence. But we want more evidence that the trust and confidence which savages display towards their fellow-clansmen is always shown at an early stage in the clan god. The attitude of the child-mind towards the supernatural is strong against the view.

Perhaps the most striking part of Dr. Jevons' book, the one indeed which will probably attract most opposition from his fellow anthropologists, is his final chapter on the evolution of belief. This seems strangely akin to the earlier views of those who held that there was a primitive revelation to all men of the One God. One cannot help thinking that Dr. Jevons is here playing upon the double meaning that may be attached to monotheism. A tribe may worship only one god, it is true; but yet they may recognize that the gods of other tribes exist equally with their own god, even though they do not worship him. It is merely playing with the etymological meaning of the word to call such a state of belief monotheism. If I remember rightly, Professor Max Müller has suggested "henotheism" to represent that phase of belief, and possibly "monolatry" may be used in the same sense. It is somewhat remarkable that Dr. Jevons should have fallen into this error, since in his penultimate chapter he lays such stress upon the fact that only the Jews, of all the nations of the earth, attain to true monotheism. Here again he refuses to go behind the facts for an explanation; his contention seems to be that genius, whether in art or religion, is incapable of explanation, and is in some degree a divine source of "revelation" of new beauty, new truth, or higher morality. Dr. Jevons thus confirms me in the words I wrote three years ago as to the present attitude of comparative religion towards the religion of the Bible: "Generally speaking, there is a marked retrogression, if I may call it so, to the position which assigns a certain amount of uniqueness to the religion of the Hebrews" (*Studies*, XVII). It is in his frank, and, one may say, scientific recognition of this plain fact, that Dr. Jevons' book will be of supreme interest to Jewish readers. It is not so long ago that Dr. Gruppe, in his *Study of Greek Myths and Cults*, came also to the same "revelational" position, much to the discontent of the anthropological school, who will have now to meet the more formidable corroboration of Dr. Jevons, who uses their own materials and yet refuses to explain the supernatural by naturalistic means. Dr. Jevons' book is one which will have to be reckoned with.

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